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Inside this issue

D-Day Weathermen Crossed the Normandy Beaches

In the last issue we highlighted the actions of the D-Day paratroop and glider-borne weather observers. In this issue we continue the saga with the story of those members of the 21st that came across the Normandy beaches.

The leadership of the 21st Weather Squadron did pioneering work in its training and preparation for the execution of Operation OVERLORD. Many men of the 21st were assigned to air support parties which were attached to infantry units. Most of these men came ashore with the initial beach assaults.

The typical air support party consisted of an officer-in-charge, five communications men, a driver, and a weatherman. They were equipped with a halftrack and a veep—a radio equipped jeep.

At their marshalling areas where the infantry units and their assigned air support parties were sequestered in preparation for the invasion, all went through a comprehensive briefing that detailed their movements leaving the landing craft, their rendezvous point, and maneuver timing.

Once briefed, the men waterproofed their vehicles to accommodate four feet of water. Those units assigned to the initial assault were loaded on their landing craft in the early morning of June 4 and camouflage netting was stretched over them. The loaded landing craft left harbor on the morning of June 5.

The experience of Sgt Patrick L. Kelly, weatherman for an air support party attached to the 8th Regiment of the 4th Infantry Division, was likely typical. Kelly drove his veep off the landing craft under intense fire from all directions, avoiding what he first thought were logs but soon discovered were the bodies of fallen comrades. Once safely ashore, Kelly jumped out and dug a hole for himself. Once the beach had been secured and a path through the fortifications established, Kelly joined the column of vehicles moving forward into their assigned area.

The 21st's historian recorded that the "twenty odd observers who worked with the ground forces of the First, Third, and Ninth Armies had what was undoubtedly the toughest job in the entire weather squadron." They were constantly subjected to enemy fire. "For them dry shelter halves and warm C-rations were comparative luxuries." With words as true today as then, the 21st's historian remarked "to survive in such circumstances. . .air force men must first be thoroughly trained in the ways and techniques of the ground forces."

Considering members of the 21st Weather Squadron participated in every major American combat operation in Europe from D-Day to V-E Day, it is almost unbelievable that the squadron lost only two men to combat fatalities.

Sgt Louis J. Heller, attached to the 4th Armored Division, was mortally wounded by enemy shell fragments on September 24, 1944. He died from his wounds two days later. Sergeant Heller was awarded the Bronze Star.

On October 6, 1944, Cpl Leonard S. Harrow was killed when the truck in which he was a passenger struck a landmine while attempting to withdraw from enemy fire. ☆

28 OWS had Deep Cold War Roots in England

Members of 28th Weather Squadron train with their assigned mobile quipment at Seymour Johnson Field, 1945.

This unofficial emblem depicting the mobile mission of the 28th Weather Squadon adorned the unit's 1945 history report.

Members of the 28th Weather Squadron's Detachment 3 prepare to launch a pilot balloon at Lakenheath, England, 1953.

On January 26, 1945, the commanding general of the Army Air Forces in the Pacific requested two mobile weather squadrons be activated for projected land operations in the theater's forward area. The Weather Wing constituted the 27th and 28th Weather Squadrons on May 30, 1945. The squadrons activated at Seymour Johnson Field, North Carolina, on June 5, 1945, and underwent intensive training.

The squadrons were ordered to port for movement to the Pacific in August 1945, but the order was soon thereafter rescinded when Japan capitulated. Both squadrons were inactivated on November 9, 1945.

The 28th Weather Squadron was reactivated on March 1, 1949, at Bushy Park, England to provide weather services for Air Force and Army units within the British Isles. The squadron was assigned to the 2105th Air Weather Group, redesignated the 2058th Air Weather Wing in October 1951.

The 28th's predominant customer was the 3d Air Division which was activated in 1948 under the command of then-Maj Gen Leon W. Johnson, a member of the initial cadre of officers assigned to the Air Corps weather service when it was formed in 1937 and a World War II Medal of Honor recipient.

The headquarters of the 28th Weather Squadron was relocated to South Ruislip, England, near 3d Air Division headquarters, on June 7, 1949; but returned to Bushy Park in March 1951. The headquarters moved to Royal Air Force Northolt, England, on October 24, 1962.

The 28th was reassigned to the 2d Weather Wing on February 8, 1954, in concert with an Air Weather Service overseas wing reorganization.

The 28th Weather Squadron's emblem was in use by 1952. The Air Force officially approved its use on April 10, 1959.

As one of seven weather squadrons eliminated as part of an Air Force directed Military Airlift Command programming action to reduce Air Weather Service command elements, the 28th Weather Squadron was inactivated on July 1, 1971, and its detachments assigned to the 31st Weather Squadron.

Air Weather Service commander Brig Gen Albert J. Kaehn, Jr., approved a reorganization plan in 1979 that included reactivation of the 28th Weather Squadron, which he officiated on July 1, 1980, at Royal Air Force Mildenhall, England. Detachments of the 28th at Lakenheath, Bentwaters, Woodbridge, Mildenhall, Upper Heyford, Fairford, and Alconbury Royal Air Force stations were activated simultaneously.

With the Air Force directed divestiture of Air Weather Service "to give mission commanders ownership of their weather support resources," the 28th Weather Squadron and its detachments were again inactivated on September 30, 1991.

Under the Air Force Weather re-engineering effort, the 28th Weather Squadron was redesignated the 28th Operational Weather Squadron on February 5, 1999. The 28th was activated at Shaw Air Force Base, South Carolina, on February 17, 1999, and assigned to the Air Combat Command's 609th Air Operations Group, severing its deep roots planted in England during the Cold War. ☆

Heritage Linked to WWI Signal Corps Meteorology

Air Force Weather directly traces its heritage to the Signal Corps Meteorology Section established in 1917 to support the American Expeditionary Force in France. The fleur-de-lis depicted in Air Force Weather heraldry—badges, emblems and logos—represents that linkage to World War I.

By the summer of 1919, the Signal Corps Meteorology Section had reduced its force to "peace-time" strength, releasing all those that had enlisted for the "period of the emergency."

The Chief Signal Officer outlined in his 1920 report to Congress that as of July 1, 1920, the Signal Corps Meteorology Section consisted of fifteen weather stations, four officers, 62 enlisted men, and three civilian meteorologists.

The Chief Signal Officer addressed issues in his 1920 report that are as relevant today as then. He reported that there was "no duplication of effort" between the U.S. Weather Bureau and the Signal Corps and that the two organizations maintained "intimate cooperation."

The Chief Signal Officer also argued "the idea that a special local meteorological station should be created and maintained for air, another for artillery, and still another for gas, sound ranging, and forecast, is erroneous and its logical result is duplication of effort and inefficiency." ☆

Army Signal Corps meteorologists working at a weather station in France during World War I. By the end of the war there were 22 Signal Corps weather stations in France, most six miles or less from the front lines.

Office of the Director of Weather Realigned

Brig Gen Thomas E. Stickford, the Air Force Director of Weather, recently announced that as part of a streamlining of the Headquarters United States Air Force offices of the Deputy Chief of Staff/Air and Space Operations, his office is now aligned under the Directorate of Operations and Training.

The Office of the Director of Weather traces its heritage to 1937 with the transfer of the Army's weather service from the Signal Corps to the Air Corps and the establishment of the Weather Section within the Office of the Chief of the Air Corps. Capt Robert M. Losey was the first to hold an office equivalent to today's Director of Weather.

Following is a recap of the titles, incumbents, and the beginning tenure dates:

Chief of Weather Section: Capt Robert M. Losey, July 1937; Maj Arthur F. Merewether, January 1940.

Director of Weather: Col Don Z. Zimmerman, March 1942; Col Harold H. Bassett, November 1942.

Air Weather Officer: Col Harold H. Bassett, July 1943.

Chief of Weather Division: Col Harold H. Bassett, September 1943; Col Donald N. Yates, January 1945.

Staff Weather Officer: Col Donald N. Yates, July 1945.

Air Weather Officer: Col Thomas S. Moorman, Jr., July 1946; Col Norman C. Spencer, Jr., July 1947.

There was no Air Staff weather office 1948-1958.

Assistant for Weather: Col Richard M. Gill, May 1958; Col James T. Seaver, Jr., July 1960; Lt Col Douglas C. Purdy, September 1962; Col Nicholas H. Chavasse, February 1963; Col Louis A. Gazzaniga, November 1967; Col Mortimer F. Bennet, December 1972; Col William E. Cummins II, August 1975.

There was no Air Staff weather office 1978-1991.

Director of Weather: Brig Gen John J. Kelly, Jr., April 1991; Brig Gen Thomas J. Lennon, May 1994; Brig Gen Fred P. Lewis, July 1996; Brig Gen David L. Johnson, July 2000; Brig Gen Thomas E. Stickford, July 2003. ☆

Capt Robert M. Losey was Chief of the Weather Section in the Office of the Chief of the Air Corps, 1937-1940. Captain Losey was killed in Norway on April 21, 1940, while serving as the Air Attaché to Sweden and Norway.

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In the next issue

USAFE OWS Heritage

"Provide the historical perspective for Air Force Weather to know its past, understand its present, and anticipate its future."

Looking Back at Air Force Weather

July 1, 1937, The Secretary of War transferred responsibility for weather support of Army aviation from the Signal Corps to the Air Corps.

July 6, 1943, The Weather Wing, today's Air Force Weather Agency, was re-assigned from Flight Control Command to Headquarters, Army Air Forces.

July 27, 1982, Air Weather Service noncommissioned officers inducted Brig Gen Albert J. Kaehn, Jr., into the Military Airlift Command Order of the Sword, AWS's first induction.

August 26, 1954, The first AN/GMQ-10 transmissometer was installed and operational at Andrews Air Force Base, Maryland.

August 31, 1956, The first crash of an Air Weather Service WB-50 occurred. Between August 1956 and January 1957, there were four WB-50 crashes, the worst series of aircraft losses in Air Weather Service history. More than 30 crewmembers were killed in these crashes.

September 1, 1937, The Signal Corps enlisted forecaster school at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, was closed and an Air Corps enlisted forecaster school established at Patterson Field, Ohio.

September 4, 1985, NASA approved Air Weather Service's request for a weather officer to participate in a space shuttle mission. Then-Maj, later Brig Gen, Fred P. Lewis was selected as the first weather officer to train for the mission.

September 15, 1964, Air Weather Service activated the Military Weather Warning Center at Kansas City, Missouri.

Brig Gen Kaehn receiving the invitation for induction into the Order of the Sword in 1982.

An Air Weather Service WB-50.

Two opponents face the soldier. . .the enemy, who must be defeated, and nature, which must be made an ally.

Field Manual 31-70
April 1968

Order of the Sword Recipients are a Select Group

Air Force Weather noncommissioned officers have selected to date only three of their leaders to receive the prestigious Order of the Sword.

The ceremony on which the Air Force's Order of the Sword is based can be traced to 1522. Air Force noncommissioned officers adopted and updated the ceremony in 1967. It honors those leaders who have made significant contributions to the enlisted corps.

The sword, a symbol of truth, justice, and power rightfully used, serves as a token for all to see and know that the recipient is a leader among leaders.

Until 1991, Air Weather Service noncommissioned officers followed the guidelines of the Military Airlift Command Order of the Sword, the Air Force's oldest program.

Brig Gen Albert J. Kaehn, Jr., commander of Air Weather Service, 1978-1982, was the first in Air Force Weather to receive the award on July 27, 1982.

Brig Gen George E. Chapman, Air Weather Service commander, 1982-1988, was inducted into the Order of the Sword on April 26, 1986.

Air Force Weather Agency noncommissioned officers resurrected the honor and presented the Order of the Sword to Col John L. Hayes, Air Force Weather Agency commander, 1997-1998, on April 4, 1998. ☆